

Making a Target Using Tatami Omote

First decide whether you will be making half, full, or multiple mat targets. We have found that for most of our tameshigiri we prefer to use targets made from a half-mat. The smaller diameter targets show us more about the quality of our technique because they bend slightly if something is not correct. Full targets are less frustrating to use, but if you want to see your mistakes, half-targets will tell you more.

Please Note: We do not recommend using a full-length piece of bamboo or dowel through the center of the target during cutting practice unless you have prior experience cutting hard materials. Serious damage to your sword may occur if you cut incorrectly!

It is important that you make sure the area where you roll your targets is completely free of dirt, rocks, or other abrasive materials. If one grain of sand or grit is rolled into your target and your sword strikes it, you will scratch the polish, dull the edge, or both. Shake out the tatami omote before you roll a target .

The technique for rolling a target is the similar no matter what size, or how many mats you use.

1. Take your half, full, or double/triple/etc. mat, and lay it flat on the clean floor or tarp.
2. To make rolling much easier you can use a 3/4" piece of PVC pipe (45"- 50") slit lengthwise. Place the cut end of the tatami into the slit and place on a table or other flat clean surface. Start rolling the mat around the dowel toward yourself to the opposite end. It is very important to keep the mat firm as you roll the target, making sure to keep all the layers of the tatami rolled together as tightly as possible. A target that has air gaps and is rolled loosely will lack stiffness and be difficult to cut. One note is that don't make them so tight as to make it really difficult to remove the dowel afterwards. The dowel should take a good strong tug to get it out but not be a struggle to remove.
3. When you have rolled the mat to within 6-10 inches of the end, grab the far edge, bring it back towards the rolled end and flatten the end with the heel of your hand or a wooden peg. Continue rolling the mat tightly until you reach the end.
4. Keeping the mat rolled tightly, tie a string approximately 2-3 inches from the end of the target and repeat the process at the other end. With the two ends tied, you can tie a third and fourth string around the center of the target. Rubber bands wound tightly can also be used. Remove the dowel.
5. Our tatami omote draws up water very quickly. If you are in a hurry, 4 hours should be a sufficient minimum time for soaking, if the targets are fully immersed. Using warm water will help. For better results we normally soak our new tatami omote targets for at least 8-12 hours. Increased soaking time does not hurt the tatami and will produce a heavier, more dense, target. Maximum density is reached in about 30 hours. Our new tatami omote can be soaked continuously for at least 5 or 6 days without softening or losing any stiffness or density. Multiple mat targets should be soaked for 24 hours, or longer, depending on the number of mats used. As the tatami ages, the color lightens, and the targets may require longer soaking times. Stand all targets up vertically in a shaded area for 30 to 45 minutes before cutting to drain off excess water. When draining the targets keep them out of the direct sunlight or strong breezes or they may dry out.

WARNING! Test cutting can be dangerous for the practitioner and those nearby. Do not attempt to do any test cutting without first getting qualified guidance from a trained instructor. Make sure that your equipment is in good working order every time you cut and be sure that the area is clear of people and obstructions. ALWAYS check to make sure that the mekugi (peg) in the sword handle (tsuka) is in good condition and firmly in place. We strongly recommend the use of two pegs for an additional margin of safety.

Please read and follow all instructions. Store your unused tatami omote in a dry area out of the direct sunlight.

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